

Mr. Tinker, the returned Boxtonian, looked at the bill that was extended toward him, and then looked at Mr. Tibb sadly. There was something in that regard which was like the pity of a man when he sees another man wronging himself.

"Why, Mr. Tibb," said Joe Tinker, in a tone of mild reproof, "that ain't worthy of you—honest, it ain't. I'm surprised—honest, I am. After me seeing what you printed in the *Banner*, and coming all this distance to be here Old Home Week!"

The smile on Starr's face grew broader, but he said nothing. Walter Eadbrook sat down on a truck and watched the proceedings with faint interest.

"When we printed that in the *Banner*," said Mr. Treadway, "we meant reputable citizens. We didn't mean—tramps."

It was Starr that winced at this, instead of Joe Tinker. Mr. Tinker shed the unkindness very easily.

"We can't all be rich," he said, with amiable philosophy. "Some of us has had bad luck. Don't you want anybody to come back to Boxtion unless they can spend money?"

The retort brought the red to Mr. Treadway's ears. He gurgled a moment in search of a fitting rejoinder, and then turned helplessly to Starr.

"What'll we do?" he asked.

Mr. Starr rubbed his chin reflectively before he made any reply.

"Is he an old resident of Boxtion?"

"He used to live here," grudgingly admitted the editor. "But he warn't any good."

"Was he born here?"

"Yes, sir, I was," replied Joe Tinker—"in the house they tore down when Mr. Williams built his big place. Wasn't I, Mr. Tibb?"

"Don't ask me," replied the grocer irritably. "I don't see what difference it makes."

"Where'd you get that copy of the *Banner*?" asked Starr.

"I found it 'side of the railroad track down to the Falls," admitted Joe Tinker. "I s'pose one of the trainmen had it in his dinner-pail."

Starr turned to the other members of the hand-shaking committee. It was evident that he was almost boiling over with laughter.

"Fellows," he announced, "I don't see but what the joke's on us."

"You don't mean to say—" began Messrs. Treadway and Tibb in chorus.

"Well, what can we do?" replied Starr.

"This old college chum of yours has fulfilled all the requirements. He's a native Boxtonian and he got here first. He came on a freight, but we didn't specify what he should travel on. Let's be sports. Mr. Tinker, welcome to our town! In behalf of the people of Boxtion, we give you the glad hand of fellowship."

AS he spoke, Starr extended his hand, and Joe Tinker was amazed into thrusting out his own. In his most scientific and professional manner, J. Bradlee Starr drew the ragged stranger to him and welcomed him home.

"Better shake with him," he advised the other members of the committee.

"Me? Not if I know it," said Joel Tibb. "You don't realize what you're doing, Mr. Starr!"

"I realize that we've invited this man to come home, and he's come home; and that we can't welch on our own proposition," replied Starr. "Tinker, I'll get you some clothes and make you look decent. The town'll put you up a week at the Commercial Hotel free of charge. According to the wording of our advertisement, you're entitled to the freedom of Boxtion. Understand, that doesn't mean that you can grab everything that isn't nailed down. It's an honorary matter. If you've got manhood in you, this ought to help put you on your feet. If you're a bum at heart, you'll remain a bum. But you'll never be able to say we quit or lay down on our word!"

Mr. Tinker looked at his benefactor, quite stupefied.

"You're kiddin' me," he said.

"No," replied Starr.

Joe Tinker took one more scrutinizing

view of Starr. Then he summed up his feelings in one brief utterance:

"I guess you warn't born and raised round these parts, mister."

Mr. Tibb and Mr. Eadbrook preferred to walk back to the Center. So Starr and Henry Treadway pushed their honored guest into the carriage and went down to the hotel.

WHEN they were inside the clean, large room that had been reserved by the hand-shaking committee for the first returning Boxtonian, Starr said:

"First thing you want to do, my friend, is to take a bath. We'll make you look like a new man. We'll send up—well, what's the matter now?"

"Am I going to sleep here?" faltered Mr. Tinker.

"Yes."

"Gee!" was the reply. "I ain't awake, that's what's the matter! I've gone to sleep along the road somewhere, and I'm dreaming this. Good Lord! I wish old Mudge could walk in and see me!"

"Old who?" snapped Starr, clutching at the name.

"Old Ezra Mudge. I don't suppose you know him. He's probably dead before now."

"No," replied Starr. "He's alive. Look here, my friend, what do you know about Ezra Mudge?"

"Me? I used to work for him. That was the last job I had before I left Boxtion. Don't I remember him, though? His wife warn't so bad as he was. Aunt Something, they called her."

Starr came over to the town's guest and looked at him closely. He was excited, but he was trying not to show it. In a low voice he asked Joe Tinker:

"Was there—er—a child in the house when you worked there? How long ago was it?"

"I know what you mean," was the crafty response. "I see what you're get-

"You answer my question," said Starr. "Were you working there when Ezra Mudge and his wife went away and brought back a child?"

"Yes, sir, I was," said Tinker positively. "I was stable-man and weed-puller and wood-chopper and forty-seven other kinds of a hired man. They didn't keep no woman."

Starr looked at his watch.

"I've got to be going," he said. "This is a big day for us. I'll tell Weatherbee how to fix you out. You're not to go outside the hotel till I come and look you over. Understand?"

PERCHED upon a big box outside the tent of "The Catornos," a swarthy little man was shouting:

"The show is just about to begin! The biggest show on the grounds! Señorita Catorno in her wonder-r-r-ful Spanish dances and the thr-r-rilling dagger-r-r act, seen and applauded by ex-President Roosevelt and all the cr-r-r-own'd heads of Europe! The show is r-r-ready to begin!"

Señor Catorno had steadily been announcing, for the past twenty minutes, that the show was just about to begin; and those who had paid their fifteen cents and gone inside the earthy-smelling tent had finished their last peanuts and were noisily demanding satisfaction.

The announcer gave an impatient and angry glance at the crowd that stood before him, cautiously fingering their money and writhing with indecision.

"What's the matter with youse guys anyway?" he spluttered, dropping suddenly from his florid style to a manner of ordinary abuse. "Step in or move on!"

A good part of the assembly, rather abashed and scared by the words and the malevolent look that accompanied them, preferred to move on out of reach of a man who was so notoriously handy with knives.

Señorita Catorno, half dressed for her

a grotesque travesty on a Spanish bull-fighter. A white shirt with cheap lace on the sleeves, a ruffled collar, tight yellow short breeches, white stockings, and a shawl thrown carelessly over one shoulder converted him, in the eyes of Boxtonians, to a genuine toreador.

The man assailed the mandolin as if it had done him some unforgivable injury. Nobody could pretend that the resulting noise was music, but it sounded very much like what a gypsy accompaniment should be, and thrilled the handful of people in the tent. Then, with a manufactured cry of abandon, Señorita Catorno swept to the center of the stage.

She wore the usual spectacular red, with a many-colored sash around her waist. She had the customary mannish hat tilted at the right angle over her black hair. A red rose in her mouth and a set of castanets completed all the illusion that it was necessary to have.

She was surely pretty. There was something so alluringly feline about her movements that the audience, composed almost entirely of men, sat bolt upright and fixed their eyes admiringly upon her. And she could dance! She was tired, listless, and angry in her heart, but she was so completely trained and had so much natural talent for rhythm that no one in the crowd below dreamed that she was not enjoying herself to the utmost.

IT was a small "house," and neither performer had the intention of completing the full act. Señorita Catorno finished one dance, bowed coldly at the resultant applause, and then took her place at the farther end of the stage, against an upright wooden stand much scarred and dented with past performances. Señor Catorno produced nine ugly-looking knives, each about a foot long, laying them upon the chair he had just deserted. A tremor of expectation ran through the crowd. Señorita Catorno gave the crowd a pitying stare and braced herself for the ordeal.

He surveyed the distance a moment, this burlesque troubadour, then silently picked up a knife, drew back his arm, and sent it flying toward the girl. It stung its

"Are you trying to kill me, Bill? You're drinking too much—that's what's the matter."



ting at. You mean a little baby they brought home."

"Yes, yes," cried Starr breathlessly. Somehow, he felt that this man's advent in Boxtion was going to be fraught with more significant results than any one dreamed. "You were there at that time? You know something about that? If you worked there, perhaps you might have heard—something?"

The eyes of Joseph Tinker, Esq., assumed a craftier look. He had been long enough on the road to become sharp to small opportunities.

"Well, maybe," he responded cautiously. "What of it?"

act, crept up behind the man and whispered:

"Better start it, Bill. The crowd inside won't wait any longer."

"You keep quiet!" was the reply. "I'm running this."

Nevertheless he took the advice, and growled himself inside the dressing-tent.

At one end of the little weathered second-hand tent a stage had been hastily knocked together. There was no curtain. When Señor Catorno appeared again, it was upon one end of this stage. He brought a kitchen chair with him, and a mandolin. By the simple expedient of shedding his street clothes he had become

way into the soft pine, and stayed, trembling, scarcely more than an inch from the girl's ear. The crowd breathed a short bark of terror. "My God, that was close!" said somebody aloud; and the reward was a leering grin from the knife-thrower.

Then, one—two—three, as fast as he could pick up the knives and take aim, Catorno threw the remaining knives. They went unerringly to the spot, making the complete round of the lithe body against the wood. The last one quivered in its place a moment, and then clattered to the floor.

Without a word, and with just the semblance of a stage smile at the spectators,